

PRACTICING Discipleship

JOHN 8.31;13.35;15.8

This morning we continue the theme of “The Least You Can Do” our look at some of the biblical principles of discipleship.

Two weeks ago we looked at three men who were considering discipleship with Jesus – who had questions about the cost of surrendering their lives to Christ and how that applied to their personal lives.

We discovered that those costs include the surrender of not only our lives, but our finances, our families, and the favors of life – those comfort areas to which we have grown so accustomed.

Last week, our subject was “Hindering Discipleship.” Jesus said that, unless these three things are true, a man cannot be His disciple.

1. He must love Christ more than his family.
2. He must love Christ more than his own life.
3. He must love Christ more than all of his possessions.

Today’s sermon is entitled “Practicing Discipleship.” While the last two lessons have looked at discipleship from the standpoint of sacrifice or cost, this lesson takes a more positive perspective. In this message, Jesus identifies those things that will be true of His disciples.

- I. Abide in My Word (John 8.31)
- II. Love One Another (John 13.35)
- III. Bear Much Fruit (John 15.8)

I. Abide in My Word (John 8.31)

John 8:31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Jesus said that of a “disciple indeed” - a true disciple – is a person who will “**abide in My word.**”

A disciple of Christ will realize that truth cannot be defined apart from the God who created the universe.

To seek truth anywhere else to the neglect of that which God has revealed is to seek a lie. And to accept such knowledge as truth is to believe a lie.

To “**abide in My word**” means to continue something that one has begun.

So where was the relationship with the word begun?

Romans 10:17 Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

James 1:18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

The message does not stop with just “abiding in My word.” There is also obedience.

The NIV translates the end of John 8:31 like this: **“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.”**

This same sentiment is captured in John’s letters:

1 John 3:24 He that keeps his commandments dwells in Christ, and Christ in him.

2 John 1:6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments.

1 John 2:4 He that says, “I know Christ” and does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

...So that we see that there is a direct connection between abiding in Christ and obedience to Christ.

John 8:32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Once again, I believe the NIV best expresses the point Jesus is making here:

John 8:31 *"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

Later, Jesus would explain this same teaching in other words:

John 14:21 *He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.*

So here is the point:

If we are to know God's truth, we must experience it in real life application. It is not what you know in your mind that makes you free, but what is proven by the application of truth through our hands, feet, and voices that makes us free.

We come to know Christ as Savior by the exposure to the truth found in Scripture and the testimony of those who have experienced it.

But knowledge alone will not lead us to love until the Holy Spirit applies it to our hearts. That love responds in obedience to the commands of Christ.

Abiding in His word – being controlled by the knowledge and love of Christ – becomes a part of us in the sense of intimacy with the power to make us free only as that knowledge and love become a part of our everyday lives.

William Hendrickson

One is free when sin no longer rules over him, and when the word of Christ dominates his heart and life. One is free, therefore, not when he can do what he wishes to do but when he wishes to do and can do what he should do.

So the first thing that identifies a true disciple of Christ is that he continues to stay in the word, to obey the commands of Christ, and allows the truth of Christ to work itself out in his everyday life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

II. Love One Another (John 13.35)

John 13:34 *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

Not only does the true disciple continue in an intimate relationship with Christ and His word, but he also demonstrates His love for Christ by his love for others.

I heard someone else say, "I cannot see how much you love God, but I can see how much you love others, and that shows me how much you love God."

Here is how the world will be able to recognize that we are disciples – by how we love one another.

It is interesting that this knowledge does not come as a result of

- our church attendance
- our giving record
- our faithfulness in participation at church-related functions or in the outreach efforts of the church
- as a result of our creed or
- our method of worship or
- our dress

...even though these are the ways that we try to prove our love for Christ. We have come so far from the truth of what Christ has taught that we are convinced that our actions are sufficient as substitutes for really obeying the commands of Christ.

We are not instructed to love one another, but commanded to. It seems that this would be an impossibility. How can we force ourselves to love someone?

And the answer is that you cannot.

We can no more make ourselves Christ-like by a willful decision than we can be saved by our own wills.

It goes back to what we just learned about abiding in Christ.

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If we are to practice the kind of love that Christ has, we must practice the kind of life that He lived.

As I pointed out earlier, Jesus was successful in His efforts in the Temple because of the time He spent on the Mt. of Olives.

We are talking about becoming like Christ, so we need to spend time in prayer and fasting and study of His word and meditating on the things that He taught day and night.

As we do, we will come to a point where such behavior as loving our fellow Christians will become something that we will not be able to avoid.

“Love one another” – 12x in NT.

- John 15.12 We are to love each other as he loved us.
- Romans 13.8 Loving one another is the fulfillment of the Law.
- 1 John 4.12 Loving one another is the way that God is revealed to the world.
- 1 John 4.7 Loving one another is the evidence that we are saved.

One of the early church fathers, Tertullian, made reference to the love of the Christians for each other by paraphrasing the words of the world of his day.

Those who were not of the church looked upon those who knew Christ and remarked, “See... how they love one another... how they are ready even to die for one another...”

Yet it seems upon observation that inside of the fellowship of the church is where we are most at risk. **EX: Vineyard BC.**

1 Peter 1:22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,

When we read Jesus’ prayer to the Father just before His crucifixion, we get some idea how critical this idea of loving one another truly is.

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John 17.20-23

Why is it critical that the church live in harmony with one another?

The church must be unified because it is through our unity that the world comes to believe that God has sent Jesus. (v. 21)

In this prayer and in these statements, Jesus makes a direct correlation between our love for one another and the salvation of lost people. (v. 23)

I have heard church members say something like, “I may have to go to church with them, but I don’t have to like them, I don’t have to trust them, and I don’t have to fellowship with them.”

What a shame that we are so self-centered that we would choose our own selfish feelings over the salvation of the world.

A person who is saved is a person who is a disciple. There is no difference between those terms. You do not have the choice of being a Christian and not being a disciple.

A disciple abides in the word of Christ and is obedient to His commands.

A disciple loves other disciples without exception.

A disciple will...

III. Bear Much Fruit (John 15.8)

Read John 15.1-8

There is so much to talk about in these verses that we won’t have time to look at them in depth this morning. We will only be able to make a cursory study in light of our look at discipleship.

The image here is of a vineyard – of a grapevine. Jesus is the vine and the Father is the vine-dresser.

Yet the Father and the Son are one, so there is no need for the Father, as vine-dresser, to prune or purge or protect Jesus.

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In light of that fact, I believe the vine, as it is addressed here, more accurately makes reference to the body of Christ, the church.

That may at first seem to contradict the literal words of the Bible and to diminish Jesus' teaching when He says, "I am the vine."

But I believe it does exactly the opposite when we consider the context of the New Testament as a whole.

The NT makes it very clear that the church is the body of Christ. In other words, on earth today, the church is Christ. He lives and moves and has His being in the lives and being of those who are of the redeemed. We are His hands and feet and eyes and mouth.

A person can no more find salvation and sanctification apart from the church than he can apart from Christ.

That does not mean that there is salvation in church membership as some parts of Christianity teach. A person can join the church without ever joining Christ, but he cannot join Christ without becoming part of the church – the body of Christ.

To teach this verse otherwise is to lean toward the idea that one can become part of Christ and then be cut off, which would contradict the clear teaching of Scripture that a person who becomes part of the family of God is secure in the faith forever.

With this thought in mind, the text goes on to say that a branch of the vine that consumes resources yet produces no fruit is nothing more than wood.

F. W. Grant

If, therefore, there is no fruit, there is manifestly no life: the branch that bears no fruit has no title to the vine...

Therefore, these branches are cut away to allow the fruitful branches to benefit from those resources.

The branches that remain are purged – cleansed – cared for so that they are free of disease and hindrances to growth.

How? Look again at v. 3 – "***because of the word.***"

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This is a reference back to point 1 – Those who are true disciples are those who abide in the word. And what is meant by the word?

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Jesus makes it clear that this is the thought behind the verse because He goes on in verse 4... (***Read v. 4***)

Jesus goes on to elaborate on what He means by "abides in Me" in verses 5 & 6.

Verse 5

The branch that abides in Christ will bring forth much fruit.

The branch cannot bear fruit of itself except as it remains connected to the vine. The vine is the source of life. The life that flows through that vine to the branch is the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit produces life in the branch.

While the branch is where the fruit is revealed, it is really only the instrument through which the vine reveals itself. The branch does nothing but "abide" in the vine.

Verse 6 speaks of those who produce no fruit. No fruit = No life. Therefore these branches are cut off to be allowed to dry out, gathered, and burned.

Now for most church members, the reference to fruit is usually a reference to works. And it is certain that works are part of what is meant by fruit.

But I believe that the emphasis in the concept of fruit is not so much on works as it is on character.

Romans 8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

The Message: God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he

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restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him.

So the ultimate purpose of our salvation is that God could transform us into the image of the Son.

Dallas Willard

“To follow in his steps is to adopt the total manner of life he did.” What Jesus did when He was in the spotlight was “the natural outflow of the life he lived when he was not on the spot.”

The works that we are called to perform do not happen as a result of our will as much as they happen from our becoming all we are called to become.

The life that we have in Christ comes through the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit not only gives life, but also produces fruit in us.

Galatians 5:22 The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

By the power and influence of the Holy Spirit, we grow in Christ until we cannot think of any other way of behaving except as Jesus would have acted.

This production of character in our hearts naturally produces in us the works of Christ. We will

- love our enemies,
- turn the other cheek,
- share the Gospel,

...not because we are commanded to, but because these are the fruit produced in us from having abided in His word – from abiding in Christ.

So, what is fruit?

- It could be the character instilled in us by the Holy Spirit.
- It could even refer to the works that are the natural result of the character that is instilled in us.

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But let's carry the analogy a bit further.

The analogy in these verses is that of a vine. So what does the Bible refer to when it speaks of “fruit of the vine”?

We find this phrase used three times in the NT, all of them quoting Jesus during the Last Supper. He is teaching the disciples the meaning of the bread and the wine as elements of communion.

When he refers to the drink, he does not call it wine, but as “fruit of the vine.”

In the OT, it is referred to on several occasions as the “blood of the grapes.” (Gen. 49.11, Deut. 32.14)

In other words, the principle product of a vineyard is not grapes, but wine.

At the Last Supper, Jesus told His disciples to drink the fruit of the vine in remembrance of Him because it represented His blood which was shed for sin.

With this analogy, the fruit that is produced by the disciple is his own blood.

Remember last week Jesus said that any man who did not hate his own life – or love his own life less – than he loved Christ, he could not be His disciple.

The true disciple of Christ...

- abides in the word of Christ and is obedient to His commands.
- loves other disciples without exception.
- bears fruit – is willing to lose his life for the sake of Christ.